United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Massachusetts State Office
451 West Street, Amherst, MA 01002
413-253-4350, fax 413-253-4375
www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Diane Baedeker Petit
NRCS Public Affairs
413-253-4371

Jeffrey LaFleur
CCCGA
508-295-4895

Cape Cod Cranberry Growers Association to develop water conservation technology under federal grant

WAREHAM, Mass. (July 11, 2008) – The Cape Cod Cranberry Growers' Association (CCCGA) is one of 45 organizations across the country recently awarded a Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) by the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). CCCGA will receive $33,416 to explore technology to decrease water usage and reduce potential nutrient run-off when bogs become overly saturated and excess water can not be removed.

USDA has announced $14 million in CIG nationally to fund projects in 40 states to develop and refine cutting-edge technologies and approaches that will help farmers conserve and sustain natural resources on their operations. CIG targets innovative, on-the-ground conservation, including pilot projects and field demonstrations.

The CCCGA project, titled "Evaluating a Subsurface Water Drainage and Irrigation System for Massachusetts Cranberry Production," is slated to take place during the 2009-2010 growing seasons.

By installing inline water control devices in subsurface drainage systems, growers will be able to quickly drain excess water from their bogs into their existing bog ditches and also exploring the possibility of irrigating cranberry beds from the bottom-up, rather than only relying on the conventional top-down approach through irrigation systems. The devices will hold back or release water into cranberry bed ditches, enabling growers to adjust the water level in a cranberry bed according to need. When a grower is ready to irrigate, the inline gate can be opened, allowing the water to enter the cranberry beds.

"There is also interest in evaluating a remote inline water level control structure, using a satellite-based system," said Brian Wick, CCCGA Director of Regulatory Services. "Growers can then monitor and open or close their control gates remotely, which is especially important during an unexpected heavy rain event or in scheduling a sub-surface irrigation session."

The satellite systems can be accessed via the Internet and have the capability to monitor water-level in the sub-surface drainage system.

-- MORE --

“This project will address both production and environmental concerns,” said Christine S. Clarke, Massachusetts State Conservationist for NRCS. “Technologically, irrigating bogs from the bottom-up could be a giant leap for cranberry growers, conserving water while preventing nutrients and pesticides from entering other water resources. The application of existing technology to enhance efficiencies in agriculture is of particular interest to NRCS. ”

CIG grants go to state and local governments, tribes, non-governmental organizations and individuals. Grantees provide matching funds to CIG bringing the total value of the approved projects to more than $28.4 million nationwide.

Approved CIG projects address traditional natural resource issues such as water quantity, water quality improvement, livestock nutrient management, grazing lands and forest health, and soil resource management. The projects also address emerging natural resource issues, including agricultural air emissions, energy conservation and market-based approaches to conservation.

# # #